GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:530
ANSWERED ON:20.11.2007
ILLITERACY IN INDIA
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Will the Minister of HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether India has the largest number of illiterates in the world and ranks a poor 126th in the Human Development Index of the UNDP;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether despite two nationwide programmes i.e. Sarva Siksha Abhiyan and the National Literacy Mission, illiteracy has not been reduced;

(d) if so, the main reasons for not eliminating illiteracy completely in the country; and

(e) the steps taken to improve the situation?

Answer

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (SMT. D. PURANDESWARI)

(a) Yes, Sir.

(b) to (d): In the past decades, there had been a continuous increase in India in the absolute number of illiterates, despite the increase in the literacy rate. However, for the first time in the year 2001, the total number of illiterates got reduced to 304.11 million from 328.88 million in the year 1991, which works out to reduction in illiteracy from 47.8% of the population in 1991 to 35.2% in 2001.As per Human Development Report 2006, India ranks 126th out of the 177 countries of the world covered by this Report. Adult literacy is only one of the several variables on the basis of which the Human Development Index is calculated. It would not be correct to say that the illiteracy rate has not been reduced despite major schemes such as the National Literacy Mission (NLM) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The decline in the number/percentage of the illiterate persons as noted above, can be attributed largely to the activities under Elementary Education and Adult Education. Under SSA, which commenced in 2001, substantially larger enrolment of children has been recorded as also a fall in the number of out-of- school children.
Various socio-economic factors such as poverty, lack of awareness, inadequate access to schools, etc., contribute to the persistence of the illiteracy in the country.

(e): In the XI Plan, special focus would be given to SCs, STs, Minorities and rural women under National Literacy Mission. Focus would also be on low literacy States, tribal areas, other disadvantaged groups and adolescents.